

Flair returns to the top

The upper echelon of pro wrestling has changed over the past few years.

The great workers, the wrestlers with the ability to have entertaining matches nightly, have been phased out. They have been replaced by the cosmetic champions, the type pushed to the top mainly because of physique, sometimes with no regard for ability.



GRUNT AND GRIN

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

The old school scored a rare and surprisingly popular victory Friday at the Meadowlands Arena in East Rutherford, N.J. Ric Flair defeated Sting and tied a pro wrestling record by capturing the World Championship Wrestling (formerly NWA) title for a seventh time. Only Harley Race, who held the title seven times between 1973 and 1983, has as many title reigns as Flair. The WCW title traces its history to 1905.

The match wasn't the greatest Flair and Sting have had against each other, but in many ways it had to be the most satisfying for Flair, who has seen the business change rapidly.

"I went through a lot of personal agony in the last six months," Flair said. "I couldn't accept that I could wrestle as good as anyone but that I was no longer in the championship picture. The hardest thing has been that I don't know if some of the wrestlers today understand the honor involved. When I broke in, the champion was held in such high esteem by all the guys."

Though Flair played a villain role while Sting was pushed by the WCW, Flair received a standing ovation from the crowd of 5,000, which braved a snowstorm to attend the match.

Referee Nick Patrick was knocked down near the end of the match and twice missed Sting putting Flair into a pinning position. As Patrick recovered, Flair hit Sting with a shoulderblock and, while Sting's foot was on the ropes, Flair scored a pin at 20:38.

Sting captured the title from Flair last July after coming back from knee surgery. "Winning the title means I can be Ric Flair again," he said.

ETC: Ricky (The Dragon) Steamboat signed a two-year contract with the WWF. He is expected to start at the end of this month. . . . Arn Anderson won the WCW television title from Tom (Z-Man) Zenk last Monday in Perry, Ga. . . . Honkey Tonk Man quit the WWF and appeared Wednesday on a Universal Wrestling Federation television taping. Expect legal action because the WWF believes it still has Honkey (real name Roy Ferris) under contract. . . . WWF has booked a March 30 show for the Tokyo Egg Dome. It will be headlined by Hulk Hogan and Genichiro Tenryu battling the Legion of Doom. . . . The annual Royal Rumble pay-per-view show takes place Saturday night at the Miami Arena. . . . Ric Flair's first major title defense will be Jan. 30 against Scott Steiner in Atlanta on a live TBS special from Atlanta. . . . WWF has a prime-time special on NBC-TV set for Feb. 1. . . . Terry Allen, whose wrestling career as Magnum T.A. was cut short by a 1986 auto accident, was hired by WCW as an assistant booker.

The "Grunt and Grin" column appears every Tuesday.

Chad

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